FASCINATING LINK

HALL'S TENURE CAN BE TRACED BACK TO 1166

WHEN AUDLEY HALL was demolished in June, 1888, Blackburn lost one of its oldest and most fascinating links with bygone days, for from time immemorial this ancient edifice was the mansion of the lay rectors of the township. It was one of two separate estates vested in the Ecclesiastical Commission, the other being Brookhouse.

It is now more than a hundred years since Charles Haworth, as a young man, began his long series of drawings depicting the vanishing Blackburn of his day and among the first of these he included the illustration attached. He records that he sketched it in company with a friend, Richard Rimmer, when it was still a pleasant farmhouse surounded by fields and meadows, adjoining the Audley brook.

The hall stood immediately east of Audley Hall Mills, on a site now covered by Edith - street. Originally its approach was bordered by

THIS HOUSE MADE HISTORY

A new series

—by GEORGE C. MILLER

an avenue of limes and it was almost completly embosomed in ancient trees.

In ruins

Long before its ultimate destruction it was in a ruinous state and the roof had fallen in, although there were some remains of mullioned windows with transoms.

I believe some of the old stone and timber went into the making of a porch for St Anne's Rectory. Now, so far as I am aware, Haworth's drawing is the only tangible evidence we have of its original structure, although I believe there was once a photo-

graph in existence. If this is still surviving, I should like to get a print from its fortunate owner to include in the town's memorials of the past.
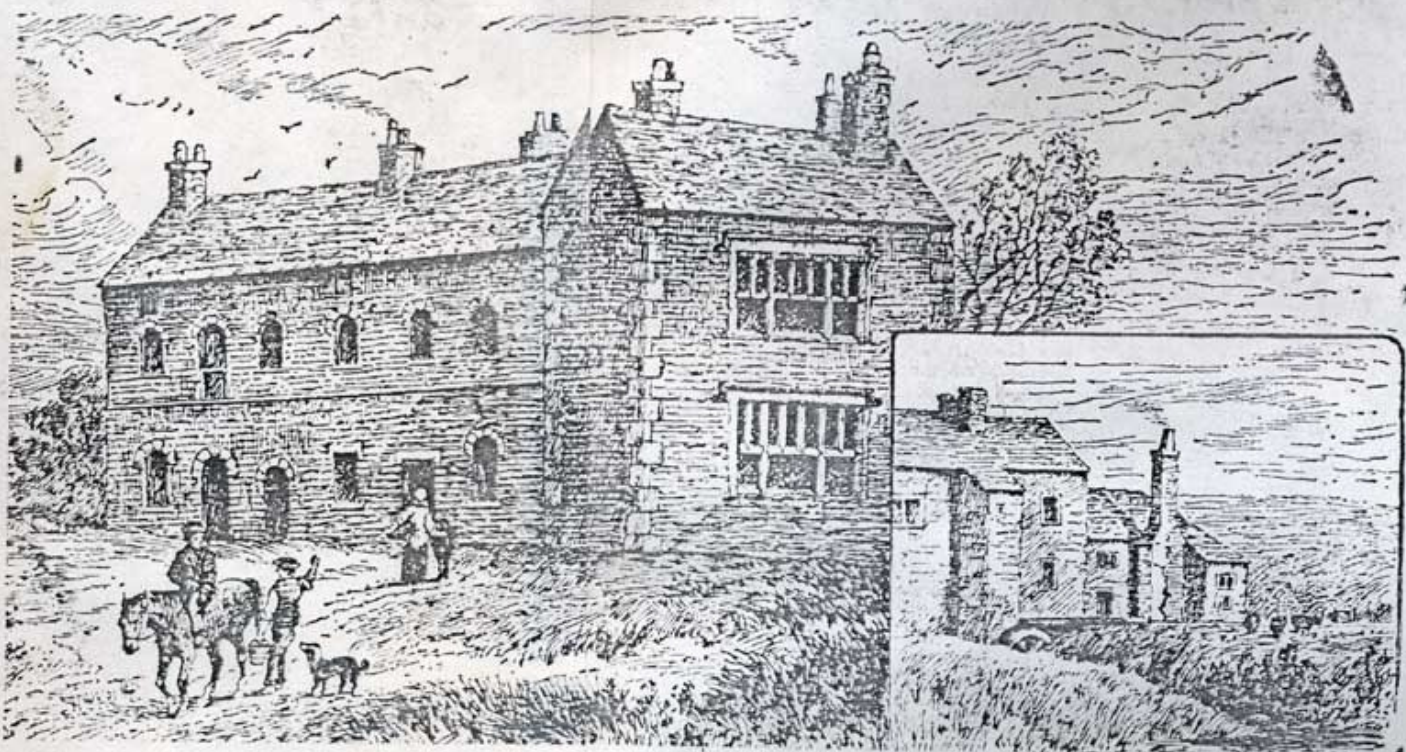
The tenure of the hall can be traced back almost certainly to 1166, just a hundred years after the Norman Conquest, when Henry de Blackborne held both church and manor. According to Peter Whittle, the Preston historian, a nunnery once existed on this spot but unfortunately we have no evidence to support his assertion and he is an unreliable authority.

Relics

"The Benedictine nuns of Audley Hall, Blackburn (he writes) existed in the year 1532, were dissolved in the time of Edward VI and restored by an Act of Queen Mary in 1554 (confirmed by Julius III, in St Peter's chair and signed Reginald Pole, Cardinal; Robert Holgate, Archbishop of York), as appears from the court rolls of York Cathedral." Later he speaks of a Lady Superior, Dame Sybil Walmsley, who died April 15th, 1536, and was interred in St Mary's Church, Blackburn, within the church.

It was because of this tradition that the Rev. Robert Smith, of St Anne's

...NG LINK WITH BYGONE DAYS

graph in existence. If this is still surviving, I should like to get a print from its fortunate owner to include in the town's memorials of the past.

The tenure of the hall can be traced back almost certainly to 1166, just a hundred years after the Norman Conquest, when Henry de Blackborne held both church and manor. According to Peter Whittle, the Preston historian, a nunnery once existed on this spot but unfortunately we have no evidence to support his assertion and he is an unreliable authority.

Relics

"The Benedictine nuns of Audley Hall, Blackburn (he writes) existed in the year 1532, were dissolved in the time of Edward VI and restored by an Act of Queen Mary in 1554 (confirmed by Julius III, in St Peter's chair and signed Reginald Pole, Cardinal; Robert Holgate, Archbishop of York), as appears from the court rolls of York Cathedral." Later he speaks of a Lady Superior, Dame Sybil Walmsley, who died April 15th, 1536, and was interred in St Mary's Church, Blackburn, within the church.

It was because of this tradition that the Rev. Robert Smith, of St Anne's Church, had a photograph taken for record purposes. Other portions of the old oak timbers were converted into relics and distributed among local Catholics.

During the period of the hall's demolition Whittle's account was sent to Canon Raine of York Minster for official verification, but without success.

"York Minster (replied the canon) possesses no court rolls and if we had any they would not contain such information as you send. The year 1532 was in the reign of Henry VIII, not Edward VI."

Whatever the truth behind Whittle's story may be, there can be no doubt that Audley Hall has figured largely in the annals of the township. For some time it was held by the Flaringtons of Worden, while among its later tenants was that rough-hewn character Sir Thomas Talbot, who died there in 1558.

Stabbed to death

It was during a raid on the hall by Roger Rishton of Ponthalgh that the latter met his death at the hands of the doughty knight, who had his own method of dealing with unwelcome intruders. According to the chronicler; "As Roger Rishton lay there helpless (having been wounded), Thomas Talbot said, 'Now I will be sure and I will give unto Rishton my mark,' striking him with such force that his dagger broke. Sir Thomas Talbot, showing his dagger to his servants said, 'I have sped him. Look, I have broken my dagger in his brain and if my dagger had not been broken I would have struck the priest that held me.' And with these furious words he departed."

Street names

The Derbyshire family tenanted Audley Hall about 1850. They intermarried with the Nightingales and between them the families farmed the land until it was taken over for building purposes. The first modern property to be erected on the estate was Audley House, built by Henry Shaw the brewer in 1849. Two other residences were soon afterwards completed and occupied by Richard Shackleton, miller and head of an old Quaker family, and W. Ashburn, cotton manufacturer, respectively.

Included among the tenancies of the estate were Audley Higher Barn, Fish Field, Great and Little Maudsley, Smaldings Farm, Snape Fields, Cicely Hole Farm and Town Green, and it is interesting to note that street names in the area still preserve their memory.

Of the subsidiary farms, Critchley's or Higher Barn stood near the site of Oxford-street Chapel; Whittaker's or Smalding's stood near a wooden turn - bridge now replaced by the existing Audley Bridge and Cicely Hole, which became separated from the remainder of the estate when the Leeds and Liverpool Canal was cut above "Twenty - steps." It stood on the slope of the hill overlooking the railway station, which was itself built on the farm land in a field known as Stony Butts.

Cicely Hole or Pomfret's Farm survived long after Audley Hall had disappeared. Clinging, precariously between the railway and the canal, it was still shown on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1933.

Before the end it witnessed some surprising changes. Once a lonely, isolated farm on the breezy hillside, looking down on the lost St Mary's Well, it was hemmed - in, first by the canal, completed in 1816; then by the railway, opened in 1846; finally, almost overnight, by the mushroom growth of the industrial era, with its factories and foundries, around which the serried ranks of terraced houses marshalled their brick battalions upon the ancient glebe land in ominous array.